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ABSTRACT

Information in this guide is simply presented to give adults a clear understanding of depression. Personal narratives are included to demonstrate how depression affects people's lives. Sections are included on the four steps for understanding, recognizing the symptoms, and getting help for depression. A discussion is included on suicidal thoughts, something common with depression. Treatment options with psychotherapy or medications are briefly described. Information is included on national helping organizations for further information. (JDM)

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Stories of depression

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Does this sound like you?

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Are you feeling really sad,
tired, and worried
most of the time?
Are these feelings lasting
more than a few days? If yes,
you may have **depression**.

Brenda's story:

"It was really hard to get out of bed in the morning. I just wanted to hide under the covers and not talk to anyone. I didn't feel much like eating and I lost a lot of weight. Nothing seemed fun anymore. I was tired all the time, yet I wasn't sleeping well at night. But I knew that I had to keep going because I've got kids and a job. It just felt so impossible, like nothing was going to change or get better.

"I started missing days from work, and a friend noticed that something wasn't right. She talked to me about the time that she had been really depressed and had gotten help from her doctor.

"I called my doctor and talked about how I was feeling. She had me come in for a checkup and gave me the name of a psychiatrist, who is an expert in treating depression.

"Now, I'm seeing the psychiatrist once a month and taking medicine for depression. I'm also seeing someone else for "talk" therapy, which helps me learn ways to deal with this illness in my everyday life.

"Everything didn't get better overnight, but I find myself more able to enjoy life and my children."

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Rob's story:

"Things in my life were going all right. I had just gotten my GED and was starting a new job in a week. My family was really proud of me. But inside, I was feeling terrible.

"At first I was feeling sad all the time, even though I had no reason to be. Then the sadness turned into anger, and I started having fights with my family and friends. I felt really bad about myself, like I wasn't good enough for anyone. It got so bad that I wished I would go to bed and never wake up.

"My older brother, who I always looked up to, saw that I wasn't acting like my usual self. He told me straight out that I seemed depressed and that I should talk to a doctor about it. I hate going to the doctor. I thought, "No way am I going in for this."

"But after a few weeks, I started having problems at work too. Sometimes I wouldn't show up because I wasn't able to sleep the night before. When I got fired, I knew I had to listen to my brother and get help.

"I saw a doctor at the health clinic. He told me I had a common illness called depression and that treatment could help. So I started to see someone at the clinic each week for "talk" therapy. This treatment helps me learn to control depression in my everyday life. It has taken some time, but I'm finally feeling like myself again."

Many people who have depression know something is wrong but don't know what to do about it. This booklet can help. It tells you about four steps you can take to understand and get help for depression.

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Four steps to understand and get help for depression:

1. Look for signs of depression.
2. Understand that depression is a real illness.
3. See your doctor. Get a checkup and talk about how you are feeling.
4. Get treatment for your depression. You can feel better.

Step 1

Look for signs of depression.

Read the following list.

Put a check mark ☑ by each sign that sounds like you:

- ☐ I am really sad most of the time.
- ☐ I don't enjoy doing the things I've always enjoyed doing.
- ☐ I don't sleep well at night and am very restless.
- ☐ I am always tired. I find it hard to get out of bed.
- ☐ I don't feel like eating much.

- ☐ I feel like eating all the time.
- ☐ I have lots of aches and pains that don't go away.
- ☐ I have little to no sexual energy.
- ☐ I find it hard to focus and am very forgetful.
- ☐ I am mad at everybody and everything.
- ☐ I feel upset and fearful, but can't figure out why.
- ☐ I don't feel like talking to people.
- ☐ I feel like there isn't much point to living, nothing good is going to happen to me.
- ☐ I don't like myself very much. I feel bad most of the time.
- ☐ I think about death a lot. I even think about how I might kill myself.

If you checked several boxes, call your doctor. Take the list to show the doctor. You may need to get a checkup and find out if you have depression.

Suicide

Sometimes depression can cause people to feel like killing themselves. **If you are thinking about killing yourself or know someone who is talking about it, get help:**

- Call 911.
- Go to the emergency room of the nearest hospital.
- Call and talk to your doctor now.
- Ask a friend or family member to take you to the hospital or call your doctor.

Step 2

Understand that depression is a real illness.

Depression is a serious medical illness that involves the brain. Depression is not something that you have "made up in your head." It's more than just feeling "down in the dumps" or "blue" for a few days. It's feeling "down" and "low" and "hopeless" for weeks at a time.

About 19 million Americans have depression. It can happen to anyone, no matter what age you are or where you come from.

Depression can make it very hard for you to care for yourself, your family, or even hold down a job. **But, there is hope. Depression can be treated and you can feel better.**

What causes depression?

You may want to know why you feel "depressed." There may be several causes.

- ○ Depression may happen because of changes in your brain.
- ● Depression runs in some families. This means that someone in your family such as a grandparent, parent, aunt, uncle, cousin, sister or brother may have depression.
- ○ Sometimes painful events or losses such as deaths can lead to depression.
- ○ Sometimes the cause of depression is not clear.

Step 3

See your doctor.

Don't wait. Talk to your doctor about how you are feeling. Get a medical checkup to rule out any other illnesses that might be causing signs of depression. Ask if you need to see someone who can evaluate and treat depression.

If you don't have a doctor, check your local phone book. Go to the government services pages (they may be blue in color) and look for "health clinics" or "community health centers." Call one near you and ask for help.

Step 4

Get treatment for your depression. You can feel better.

There are two common types of treatment for depression: (1) medicine and (2) "talk" therapy. Ask your doctor which type is best for you. Some people need both treatments to feel better.

Medicine

- ○ Medicines for depression are called **"antidepressants."** Your regular doctor or a **psychiatrist** (a medical doctor trained in helping people with depression) can prescribe them for you.

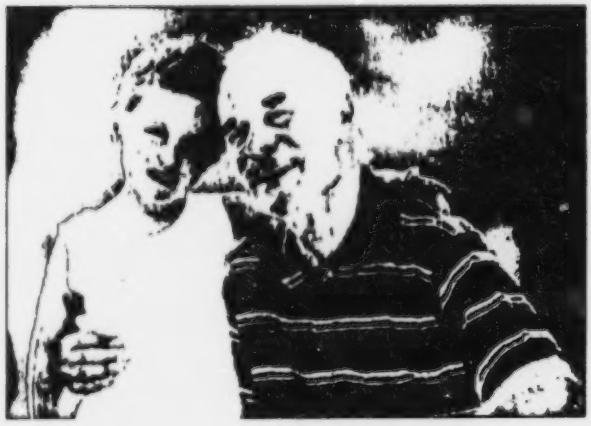
- ○ Antidepressants may take a few weeks to work. Be sure to tell the doctor how you are feeling. If you are not feeling better, you may need to try different medicines to find out what works best for you.

○ Medicines sometimes cause unwanted "side effects." You may feel tired, have blurred vision, or feel sick to your stomach. Tell the doctor if you have these or any other side effects.

"Talk" therapy

○ "Talk" therapy involves talking to someone such as a **psychologist**, **social worker**, or **counselor**. It helps you learn to change how depression makes you think, feel, and act. Ask your doctor or psychiatrist who you should go to for talk therapy.

You can feel better.



How to help someone who may have depression

If you know someone who seems depressed and may need help, here are some things you can do:

- Tell the person that you are concerned about him or her.
- Share this booklet with the person.
- Talk to the person about seeing a doctor.
- Take the person to see the doctor.
- If the doctor offers the name and phone number of a psychiatrist or someone for "talk" therapy, call the number and help the person make an appointment.
- Take the person to the appointment.
- "Be there" for the person after he or she starts treatment.
- Contact any of the places listed under "For more information" in this booklet.

For more information:

You can call or write any of these organizations for free information about depression. You can also find more information on their web sites. "Free call" phone numbers can be used free by anyone, anywhere in the United States.

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)
Office of Communications and Public Liaison
Information Resources and Inquiries Branch
6001 Executive Boulevard
Room 8184, MSC 9663
Bethesda, MD 20892-9663
Free call: 1-800-421-4211
Local call: 301-443-4513
Hearing impaired (TTY): 301-443-8431
Web site: http://www.nimh.nih.gov
E-mail: nimhinfo@nih.gov

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)
2107 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201-3042
Free call: 1-800-950-6264
Local call: 703-524-7600
Web site: http://www.nami.org

National Depressive and Manic Depressive Association (NDMDA)
730 N. Franklin Street, Suite 501
Chicago, IL 60601-7204
Free call: 1-800-826-3632
Local call: 312-642-0049
Web site: http://www.ndmda.org

National Foundation for Depressive Illness, Inc. (NAFDI)
P.O. Box 2257
New York, NY 10116
Free call: 1-800-239-1265
Local call: 212-268-4260
Web site: http://www.depression.org

National Mental Health Association (NMHA)
1021 Prince Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-2971
Free call: 1-800-969-6642
Local call: 703-684-7722
Free call - hearing impaired (TTY):
1-800-433-5959
Web site: http://www.nmha.org

This publication has been adapted by Melissa Spearing, Office of Communications and Public Liaison, National Institute of Mental Health from "Depression," NIH Publication No. 00-3561.

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Things to remember:

1. Look for signs of depression.
2. Understand that depression is a real illness.
3. See your doctor. Get a check-up and talk about how you are feeling.
4. Get treatment for your depression. You can feel better.

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